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# General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

*Official Records*

**21**st plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

*President:* The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Address by Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic**

**The President**: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

*Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President**: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Akayev** (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly and to wish great success to the work of the fifty-eighth session under your wise guidance. I also take this opportunity to extend deep appreciation to Mr. Jan Kavan for his insightful leadership of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

This is my second successive participation in the work of the General Assembly. In my statement last year, I supported the resolute actions of the anti-terrorist coalition in eliminating the Central Asian centre of international terrorism in Afghanistan, as well as the other measures taken by the world community to address global challenges to international peace and security.

As life has demonstrated, the United Nations plays a highly positive role in organizing the common struggle against international terrorism. In this regard, the idea of giving the United Nations the lead role in guiding the global anti-terrorist coalition deserves genuine support. One of the primary objectives of my statement last year was to appeal to the United Nations to recognize, as a great event in the history of my country, the two thousand, two hundredth anniversary of Kyrgyz Statehood, as an event of international status.

The resolution of the General Assembly on Kyrgyz Statehood was a powerful force in raising the national spirit of our people. For that, we are sincerely grateful to our Organization. Indeed, whenever any problems emerge at a global level, we turn to the United Nations and unfailingly get support.

Recently, there have been heated discussions concerning the role of the United Nations. Some hotheads even allege that the United Nations has exhausted its potential. I believe that such ideas contradict the interests of the world community, although on the whole, I see nothing wrong with debates on this theme. Such discussions are demonstrations of democracy, to the development of which the United Nations has significantly contributed worldwide.

The development of democracy at a national level involves differences of opinion and criticism of the authorities. Something similar takes place in the framework of the world community. Here, too, a

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polarization of opinions is occurring, but in this case it is our common offspring — the United Nations — that is coming under attack. Attempts to jeopardize its role are perceived, especially by small countries, as undermining that international body which embodies the interests of all mankind. There is a wise saying: "Small countries must have big friends". The United Nations is just such a big reliable friend.

However, it is difficult to deny that the work of the United Nations is not yet ideal. Certainly its efficiency needs to be enhanced. We understand the Secretary-General's concern for the situation of the United Nations, and we fully share his assessment of the current world situation.

In this regard, the attention paid to the work of this current session of the General Assembly by many heads of State is impressive. The statements made by Mr. George Bush, the President of the United States; Mr. Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation; Mr. Jacques Chirac, the President of France; Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, Chancellor of Germany, as well as other heads of State, despite certain differences in approach, clearly have shown the desire to have a definite role for the United Nations in building the new world order, one that is better in keeping with the aspirations of all people on Earth.

The most efficient way of overcoming disagreements in political practice is to search for compromise. We are pleased to note that the technique of compromise is playing a positive role in resolving disagreements on such a key issue for the world as the settlement of the problem of Iraq. This is an encouraging sign.

We would like to stress, again, that any measures to improve the United Nations should be based solely on the idea of improving the work of the Organization. The Kyrgyz Republic is ready to support reasonable proposals on this subject, including measures to increase the efficiency of the work of the Security Council.

I believe that alongside the search for ways to improve the United Nations, we should concentrate on those specific problems which will need to be resolved again in the foreseeable future. In this regard, we may look at the results of the Millennium Summit, to those vital problems that were highlighted at that time in the discerning report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan entitled, "We the Peoples" (A/54/2000), and also contained in the Millennium Declaration. These last three years have highlighted even more the importance of the issues raised at that time.

Since then, the fight against international terrorism was added as one of the major challenges to international peace and security. The report of Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan to the present session of the General Assembly focuses the attention of Member States on the need to increase their efforts towards implementing the Millennium Declaration. This approach deserves very broad support.

I believe that only such a universal, global organization as the United Nations is able to cope with the challenges faced by the world community. But the United Nations needs help, and we, through our joint efforts, particularly with the support of the big Powers, can accomplish this. If we do not, then we would be acting at cross-purposes and could expect a grim result.

Besides common problems shared by the world community, each country has its own specific problems. Kyrgyzstan is determined to resolve its own problems through reliance on its own efforts. Addressing this Assembly, I cannot fail to stress the concentration of our efforts on advancing the democratic process. In particular, last year I put forward a national idea entitled, "Kyrgyzstan — a country of human rights". For the development of this idea, a Democratic Code was elaborated and a Public Council of Democratic Security was established. Following the outcome of a national referendum, a new Constitution was adopted which more fully reflects the level of democracy attained as well as new challenges to its development. These measures have given a powerful stimulus to the progressive movement of our country towards a democratic system.

We also attach great importance to the establishment of fair, open and responsible governance and to enhancing the effectiveness of the anti-corruption policy being pursued. This year I established the National Council on Conscientious Governance to strengthen the work being conducted in Kyrgyzstan to create an anti-corruption atmosphere in our society.

We are focusing our main efforts on the fight against poverty, but the Republic cannot resolve this problem without external assistance. We highly commend the role played by the United Nations in the

fight against poverty, and the measures undertaken by our Organization. Again, we appeal to the world community and to the developed countries not to reduce their efforts in providing assistance to the developing countries for the purpose of overcoming poverty.

In the autumn of 2002, under the aegis of the United Nations, the Global Mountain Summit was held in our capital, Bishkek. The Bishkek Global Mountain Platform adopted at the Summit has, in essence, become the outcome document of the International Year of Mountains, observed by the United Nations. The document has defined key tasks for sustainable development of the mountain regions of our planet. To address them, Switzerland has initiated creation of the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions. This is only the beginning; we have just set in place the first building blocks for the foundation of an institutionalized home for the mountain regions.

Kyrgyzstan hopes to receive assistance from the United Nations and its family of organizations towards the establishment of an international information and educational centre for mountain States, as well as for a network for developing mountain States, with its secretariat established in Bishkek. I believe that the Kyrgyz Republic is the best possible location for this centre since most of our country is mountainous.

The United Nations faces an abundance of problems. One of the most important challenges is the fight against international terrorism. Other global challenges include political and religious extremism, territorial separatism, drug trafficking and the fight against fatal illnesses such as HIV/AIDS and others.

It is becoming increasingly urgent to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. The Kyrgyz Republic supports taking decisive measures in this respect. We believe, however, that force should be used only on the basis of Security Council decisions and in accordance with international law so as to prevent conflict and discord within the international community.

Not only must global measures be taken in this respect, but efforts must be made at the regional and national levels. One good example of such efforts is the work done by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, with the lead role being played by Russia and China, actively relying on the Central Asian participants.

In conclusion, I should like once again to stress not only my full confidence in the United Nations, but also the determination of the Kyrgyz Republic resolutely to strive, together with our partners in the international community, for the preservation and strengthening of this Organization, which we believe most fully reflects our interests. May the Almighty help us in this work, and let all good peoples of the world join in our prayers for the success and prosperity of the United Nations.

**The President**: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Kyrgyz Republic for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Askar Akayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

**Agenda item 9 (*continued*)**

**General debate**

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Elvin Nimrod, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Trade of Grenada.

**Mr. Nimrod** (Grenada): It is with a deep sense of pride and pleasure that my delegation congratulates you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. You have done the entire Caribbean region proud. Your own country, Saint Lucia, one of the smallest States Members of this Organization, can feel especially proud. We are confident that, given the combination of your vast experience, solid leadership skills and charismatic personality, this session will go down in history as one of the most dynamic and constructive for all States, large and small.

My delegation pays tribute to your illustrious predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his enlightened and innovative conduct of this body during the previous session.

My delegation also expresses profound sympathy to the Government and the people of Saint Lucia on the recent passing of your predecessor, Sir, as Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Honourable George Odlum.

Each succeeding President of the General Assembly inherits an agenda of recurring resolutions and outcome documents adopted at the many international summit-level conferences during the past

decade. My delegation remains confident that your administration, Sir, will put implementation concerns high on the development agenda.

When the United Nations was founded 58 years ago, the focus was basically on world peace and security in the aftermath of the devastating effects of the Second World War. Security concerns have once again taken centre stage in current international affairs, but they should not displace the consideration of important issues on the economic and social agenda.

My Government remains totally committed to the global fight against terrorism and the perpetrators of violence. In this regard, it will certainly take all necessary actions to ensure that Grenada is an active partner in this common struggle.

The proliferation of transnational criminal activities is the most vivid example of the negative effect of open borders in a globalized world. The illicit trade in weapons and drugs, money-laundering and trafficking in women and children clearly need to be tackled in a more organized manner. A truly effective global response to these and other threats requires that all States act in concert with each other. In this regard, my Government, despite its limited resources, is fulfilling its commitment.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Grenada has ratified or acceded to all relevant international treaties and conventions on terrorism and related activities. All the appropriate domestic legislation has been enacted.

My delegation is convinced that the elimination of terrorism alone will not guarantee social and economic stability. It will not solve the many problems associated with underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and unemployment — all of which give rise to hopelessness and pose a threat to peace and security.

The holding of the recent meeting here at the United Nations to assess the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS made clear that the pandemic is continuing to take a heavy toll, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean.

As the many leaders who took part in the debate said, much remains to be done in the fight against this dreadful scourge if the Declaration of Commitment target is to be met by 2005. Thus, certain critical areas in this fight, such as education on prevention and care targeted especially to young people, mobilization of resources by engaging civil society including the business sector, and access to affordable medicine are absolutely essential.

Fighting HIV/AIDS is both a medical and a socio-economic problem, with far-reaching implications for small developing countries such as my own. Caring for the ever-increasing numbers with the virus, together with educating and sensitizing the general public on prevention issues and responsible behaviour, has become burdensome, in terms of both human and financial resources. Partnership and support from the developed countries will be welcomed.

My delegation is convinced that the eradication of poverty and its related ills is central to social and economic stability. Poverty will not simply disappear through passionate pleas and eloquent statements, but through genuine collaborative and cooperative efforts. My Government is acutely aware of our responsibility, as a sovereign and independent nation to provide for our citizens.

The efforts of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to establish a single market and economy with a view to harnessing and efficiently utilizing the limited resources of the region, improving competitiveness, productivity and general cooperation, must be applauded.

The more developed countries must speedily come to the rescue of the needy developing countries by providing tangible and meaningful technical, economic and other forms of assistance — assistance that will have a positive impact on the lives of millions in the developing world.

It is for this reason that we will continue to clamour for reforms within the global trading system, and especially within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), particularly as it relates to trade in agriculture and in other services.

My delegation calls for a substantial reduction of the subsidies afforded to farmers in the more developed and industrialized economies, and also for the removal of non-tariff and other technical barriers to the export of our commodities.

In our efforts to diversify our economies and to enhance our revenue-earning options, we need the flexibility to develop our service sector free from pressures and conditionalities, to add value to our

primary products, and to be able to export our exotic fruits and vegetables.

Our small and vulnerable economies can become viable if the right conditions are created to facilitate the trade of our products on the world market.

The failure of the recently concluded WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancún, Mexico, to reach a compromise on issues of extreme importance is a cause for concern. The outcome has confirmed, in unequivocal terms, that the divide between rich and poor nations continues to widen.

My country endorses the idea that the United Nations must continue its work to ensure that democracy and respect for basic human rights prevail in all civil societies. However, this body should, as a matter of principle, also seek to ensure that fair, just and morally correct actions and decisions are taken on equally important matters.

The people of the Republic of Cuba continue to live under a unilaterally imposed financial, commercial and economic blockade, as they have for more than 40 years. This has resulted in great human and material losses, and in many personal traumatic experiences. Grenada joins the overwhelming majority in the United Nations and calls for the unconditional lifting of those sanctions.

We believe that universally accepted norms and values and economic growth and prosperity can flourish only under normal circumstances. The people of Cuba need that chance.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to escalate, and every effort must be made to return to the road map, as it remains the best hope for the resolution of the problem.

Similarly, my delegation is concerned about the negative effect of civil unrest and tensions around the globe, particularly in Iraq, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government supports all efforts, actions and initiatives to ensure that normalcy returns to the countries and regions concerned. We urge patience, understanding and tolerance in dealing with these difficult situations.

The United Nations has been seized with the reform of the Security Council and with the revitalization of the General Assembly for a number of years. When the United Nations was founded 58 years ago, the membership was 51; today there are 191 Member States.

Much has changed in the geopolitical dynamics of the world, which the United Nations represents and reflects. Therefore, there is a need for structural and functional changes in the Security Council and the General Assembly, two of the main organs of greatest importance in the world body.

At the beginning of this intervention, I alluded to the tardiness in the implementation of collective decisions, particularly on the subject of the sustainable development of small island developing States. A total of six summit conferences have been held over a period of 11 years to address the issues of the environment and development in those vulnerable island States.

Donor countries have not fulfilled their end of that partnership. Official development assistance continues to fall, and multilateral aid has dropped significantly. Ten years later, another high-level meeting is scheduled to take place in Mauritius in 2004 to review the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action.

My delegation is hopeful that the occasion will be used to ensure that the priority issues facing small States will be addressed in a way that gives optimism to the millions whose lives depend on a commitment to the following issues: improving their preparedness for, and recovery from, natural and environmental disasters; addressing the problem of climate change and sea-level rise, which could submerge low-lying nations in the Caribbean and the Pacific; preventing worsening shortages of potable water; developing solar and renewable energy to lessen dependence on expensive imported oil; and managing growth in tourism to protect the environmental and cultural integrity of our nations.

My delegation's appeal to this session of the General Assembly is for all stakeholders, including the multilateral financial institutions, demonstrate their total commitment to the entire process in order that efforts to implement outstanding important commitments can be finalized.

Despite the uncertainty over adequate funding for implementation, my delegation remains confident, Mr. President, that, with your ability to lead and build consensus, this fifty-eighth session will become known as the General Assembly of implementation.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently stated:

> "We all live on the same planet, buffeted by the same winds, influenced by the same currents of change. But instead of acting on what unites us ... we allow a chasm to persist between us ... We need to mend this great divide with a new fabric of solidarity".

My delegation is convinced that we have the opportunity to build and develop this new kind of solidarity and partnership between rich and poor, big and small, powerful and weak, at this session of the General Assembly. The opportunity is ours to embrace or to lose.

**The President**: I now call on His Excellency Mr. François Lonsény Fall, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Guinea.

**Mr. Fall** (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): On 19 August 2003, the international community took a blow to the body in Baghdad in odious acts that caused the tragic loss of approximately 20 United Nations officials, including the lamented Sergio Vieira de Mello, Special Representative of the Secretary-General. By attacking a symbol as prestigious as the United Nations, the forces of evil intended to destroy the firm resolve of our Organization to carry out its mission of safeguarding international peace and security.

Those unspeakable crimes demonstrate once again the intensity of terrorism in all its forms and underscore the vital need for the international community to reaffirm its solidarity in order to find the ways and means to stamp out this scourge, which remains one of the greatest threats to humankind's harmonious development. My delegation energetically condemns those vile acts and pays tribute to the memory of the victims. It renews to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, the sincere compassion of the people and Government of Guinea, particularly of His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea.

My delegation also wishes to take this opportunity to express its deep gratitude to Mr. Annan for the courage and the effectiveness with which he is leading the destiny of our Organization. The Republic of Guinea will be unstinting in its efforts to make its contribution to the influence of the United Nations, which, it hardly needs to be said, remains the primary framework for concerted action in the conduct of international relations.

I wish to take this opportunity to convey my delegation's warmest congratulations to you, Mr. President on your well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. Appreciating your great ability, there can be no doubt that you will skilfully follow up the work of your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, whose dedication and skill were greatly appreciated in the course of the previous session.

Africa, where more than one third of the population lives in absolute poverty, continues, alas, to be the scene of fratricidal wars, whose negative effects undermine the development policies of its States. Notwithstanding that bitter state of affairs, marked progress has been made in extinguishing hotbeds of tension. Hope is reborn in West Africa.

Sierra Leone is being stabilized, thanks to the active support of the international community, but also, and above all, thanks to the patriotism of Sierra Leoneans and the determination of their leaders to close the book on war. My country, while expressing its appreciation for the respect shown for the criteria for the withdrawal of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), takes the view that the success of that plan also hinges on increased assistance to Sierra Leone, as well as the effective restoration of State authority throughout the territory.

In Liberia, with the departure of President Charles Taylor on 11 August, a new era is becoming apparent for that country, scarred by 14 years of fratricidal war, which augurs well for the subregion as a whole — particularly the Mano River basin, whose overall development has long been jeopardized. We wish to pay tribute to the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations that have made it possible to secure a ceasefire and to achieve the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, thus opening the way for the establishment of a Government of transition and national reconciliation. My delegation appeals to the international community for effective support for the implementation of the Accra accord, so that Liberians can finally be reconciled among themselves and can tackle the reconstruction of their country in renewed democracy.

The joint action undertaken by ECOWAS, the United Nations and the development partners to deploy the multinational force and ensure the maintenance of peace in Liberia should be supported and welcomed. The establishment of this stabilization force has proved vital to facilitate the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, to make it possible to carry out a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and to promote the return of refugees and national reconciliation.

However, my country remains convinced that the perpetrators of hateful crimes must answer for their acts. That is why we support unreservedly the decisions of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in its fight against impunity. That is a moral and political requirement.

In Côte d'Ivoire, my delegation urges all the parties to pursue dialogue to implement effectively the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, and thus achieve national reconciliation.

In Guinea-Bissau, recent developments have made even more fragile a situation that was already precarious because of years of political instability and economic crisis. My delegation appeals for the creation of better conditions for a rapid return to normal constitutional life, which is vital to the recovery of that fraternal country.

Guinea attaches great importance to the restoration of lasting peace in our subregion. It has paid a heavy price in terms of instability, whose negative consequences have impeded its progress.

Despite a particularly difficult economic situation marked by the drastic drop in bauxite and aluminium prices and the soaring price of petroleum, Guinea continues to tackle the burden of refugees and displaced persons. I wish to reiterate the Guinean Government's appeal to the donor community for increased assistance in managing refugees and displaced persons and for strengthening the capacity of our country to pursue its programme to combat poverty while consolidating its democratic achievements.

I would like to address the situation in the Great Lakes region, where there are promising prospects. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite the humanitarian crisis in the eastern part, considerable progress has been made, particularly in the context of the disengagement of foreign armed forces and current demobilization and reintegration operations. We hope that the Transitional Government of National Unity will do its utmost to preserve the territorial integrity of the country and to promote a return to normal constitutional life.

My delegation appeals to the international community to support the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) with the resources necessary to carry out its mandate, which has been enhanced by Security Council resolution 1493 (2003).

In Burundi, my delegation welcomes the encouraging results in the implementation of the Arusha Agreement and calls on all parties to put an end to hostilities to strengthen the peace, which is still fragile, and to promote humanitarian assistance.

In the Central African Republic, my delegation appreciates the commitment of the new authorities to promote the return to constitutional legality in the context of consensual management.

In the Horn of Africa, the permanent and binding commitment of Ethiopia and Eritrea concerning the delimitation of borders is a prelude to the return to peace between the two countries. With regard to Somalia, my delegation hopes that the Mbagathi Conference in Kenya will make it possible to overcome past contradictions and restore comprehensive everlasting peace.

I cannot fail to address the thorny question of the Western Sahara, which has mobilized the energies of the international community for decades. The Republic of Guinea, which has always advocated a peaceful settlement of the issue, remains convinced of the urgent need for a political settlement under the auspices the United Nations — the only body that can guarantee a fair and lasting solution that is mutually acceptable to all parties.

The future of our continent is closely bound up with international peace and security, and so we will continue to express our profound concern about conflicts that cause upheavals in other parts of the world.

First, in the Middle East, the appointment of Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, the publication of the Quartet's road map and the establishment of a unilateral cease-fire by the Palestinian armed groups had given us grounds for hope. These hopes,

unfortunately, are threatened by the resumption of the cycle of violence. We have together a historic duty to salvage peace. The international community and the Quartet must do everything to give a fresh impetus to the dialogue between the parties. For their part, Palestinians and Israelis have the obligation to honour their respective commitments, in order to win mutual trust.

My delegation is convinced that a comprehensive and lasting settlement of the crisis in the Middle East necessarily involves tackling the Lebanese and Syrian aspects and the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Guinea, which has always been at the forefront in defending legitimate struggles for just causes, hails the historic role of President Yasser Arafat in restoring the inalienable rights of the martyred people of Palestine. Here we reiterate our firm opposition to any attempt to undermine his political or physical integrity, and once again send him our sympathy and support. We also encourage the new Prime Minister of Palestine, Mr. Ahmed Qorei, to do his utmost to create favourable conditions for dialogue aiming at a durable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On the question of Iraq, which is going through a phase that is crucial for its future, my delegation encourages the United Nations to continue and strengthen its peace mission and its mission of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance so that the Iraqis can quickly take charge of their country's destiny in unity and democracy.

With regard to Afghanistan, the international community needs to step up its assistance, particularly in the area of security and development assistance, so as to give support to the Transitional Administration, in implementation of the Bonn Agreement.

My delegation urges on the Korean peninsula the parties to pursue their efforts to achieve the peaceful and independent reunification of the two Koreas and to settle the nuclear issue by dialogue.

The Guinean Government reaffirms its commitment to the principle of a single China. It welcomes the efforts being made by the People's Republic of China to safeguard international peace and security.

Concerning the crisis in Cyprus, whose resolution is still bogged down, in spite of the Secretary-General's determination, we appeal to the parties to show political will, so that they may return to the negotiating table on the basis of the revised plan.

Poverty, armed conflicts, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, organized transnational crime and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, continue to be major obstacles to peace, security and development. Safeguarding international peace and security depends on our commitment to eradicating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as well as mercenary activities, all of which fuel conflicts, particularly in Africa.

This is all the more true since in July, in this very Hall, Member States were able, at the First Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, were able to gauge the devastating effects of light weapons, whose major victims, unfortunately, continue to be women and children. My delegation reiterates the appeal by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for adequate financial assistance to effectively implement the moratorium on small arms and light weapons. It also calls for effective implementation of Security Council resolution 1467 (2003), adopted at the end of the workshop organized by my country when it held the presidency of the Council in March 2003, on the theme "Proliferation of small arms and light weapons and mercenary activities: threats to peace and security in West Africa."

Mindful of their primary responsibilities for the recovery of the continent, African leaders are continuing their efforts in implementing the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) effectively. The commitments undertaken at the second summit of African Union heads of State at Maputo are part of this process. Guinea welcomes the support of the international community, particularly the G-8 countries for the African Union and its programme, NEPAD. We also welcome the initiatives taken by development partners to increase public assistance, relieve debt and provide for improved access to markets.

Guinea welcomes also the useful arrangements planned by the United States, the European Union and Japan to combat the HIV/AIDS, malaria and

tuberculosis pandemics, as well as food insecurity. These efforts, which we encourage, were undoubtedly strengthened by the recent agreement at the World Trade Organization (WTO) enabling the poorest countries to have access to generic drugs and thus to tackle the health tragedy of 6 million deaths annually as a result of those three pandemics alone.

My delegation, however, regrets the lack of consensus at Cancún at the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the WTO. We remain convinced that the international community will continue the debate, aiming at further integration of the weaker economies into the world trading system. We need to do our utmost to ensure that globalization is better managed and less iniquitous. The common good must be at the heart of our concerns.

The path ahead of us is still long and full of pitfalls. The midterm review shows that, at least as far as Africa is concerned, there is not great optimism abut achieving the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. We hope that the spirit of solidarity which is still developing at the level of the international community can be translated into tangible acts and galvanize everyone to action, so that future generations will acknowledge our struggle to ensure the development of humankind. In order to achieve this, we must reaffirm our unity and promote multilaterism to enable our common Organization to tackle the challenges of peace, security and social and economic progress.

The latest developments in the international situation have demonstrated the extent to which the United Nations is still the unique framework for consultation and concerted action in the management of world affairs. Strengthening the role and capacities of the United Nations is therefore more than ever essential in order to provide fair, lasting and equitable solutions to issues of major importance. My delegation appreciates the efforts to reform the United Nations and revitalize the work of the General Assembly.

In this regard, we support the recommendation of the Secretary-General concerning the setting up of a high-level panel to propose ways to strengthen the United Nations by reforming its institutions.

All these steps to help improve the effectiveness of the Organization must of course be underpinned by a genuine reform of the Security Council so as to make its membership more representative. This will make it possible to enhance its transparency and give all States, large and small, the opportunity to find a voice there and thus make their due contribution to the building of a renewed world.

**The President**: I now give the floor to the Honourable Knowlson Gift, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Gift** (Trinidad and Tobago): It is indeed a signal honour for me to extend to you, Sir and to the Government and people of the sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) State of Saint Lucia our heartfelt congratulations on your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We are confident that, under your experienced and pragmatic leadership, the Assembly will address in a forthright manner the many and varied challenges which confront the international community.

My delegation is equally confident, Sir, that the developing-country perspective that your presidency will bring to our deliberations will serve to highlight the plight of the weak and the vulnerable among us, as we struggle to come to terms with the realities of contemporary international relations.

Mr. President, please allow me the opportunity to express our satisfaction at the astute leadership shown by your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, and at the many initiatives that he pursued during his tenure, including those in the areas of institutional strengthening and the prevention of armed conflict, in an attempt to restore to this body its central role, as mandated by the Charter. I also applaud his inclusive approach to advocacy, evinced by his short but fruitful visit to Trinidad and Tobago in February this year to engage in a brief, interactive high-level dialogue with the heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community on the work of the Assembly and on some of the major issues before this global forum as they relate to small States.

It would be remiss of me if I did not compliment the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his sterling performance in the face of the myriad crises since our last session. We have total confidence in his continuing stewardship of this unique world body. My delegation wishes to assure him of the total support of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for his untiring efforts to ensure the continued relevance of the United Nations in the

pursuit and achievement of the Organization's objectives.

Trinidad and Tobago joins the rest of the international community in expressing our profound sorrow at the tragic loss of life suffered most recently by men and women of the United Nations while on a humanitarian mission in Iraq, as a result of the bombing on 19 August 2003 of the United Nations office in Baghdad. We shall forever remember them in our prayers, together with those others who, over the years, have made the supreme sacrifice in selfless service to the Organization and, by extension, to mankind. We are of the view that consideration should be given to the erection of a fitting memorial here, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, to honour all those who have given their lives in the field in the service of the United Nations.

The United Nations cannot retreat from its global responsibilities in the face of even such an atrocity. We are firmly convinced that the United Nations — born out of the destruction wrought by the Second World War and representing the collective hope of mankind to spare future generations from the scourge of war — must rise to this difficult challenge and continue to play an even more central and proactive role in managing world affairs, particularly with respect to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The challenge before us is to make the world peaceful and secure. That is a particular concern of small States, which must rely on the international rule of law, on the strict observance by all States of the purposes and principles laid down in the Charter of the United Nations, and on the collective security mechanism of the Security Council in order to guarantee their right to a secure, sovereign and peaceful existence. We must therefore work to strengthen the rule of law worldwide as well as the capacity of the United Nations to engage both in conflict prevention and in the management of global crises that disrupt international peace and security. It is also of paramount importance that all Member States commit to and uphold the multilateral approach in our collective efforts to attain those ends.

Nowhere is there a more pressing need for peace and security than in the Middle East. Clearly, a just and lasting peace is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis, who have been constant witnesses to death and destruction in their respective societies and who have watched as their once promising economies have been devastated by the unceasing instability in the region. Peace continues to be elusive, notwithstanding the latest best efforts of the Quartet, whose road map for measured and reciprocal steps within a specific time frame enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of the international community.

There can be no peace and prosperity for that region without the political will of leaders on both sides of the conflict. Neither can there be progress on the path of peace without focused and sustained effort on the part of the international community in providing the necessary political support to the parties directly involved. My delegation is of the opinion that, under the present circumstances, consideration should be given to deployment of a United Nations force so that realistic and mutually acceptable confidence-building measures can be put in place, thereby restoring some measure of security to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

In Iraq, the goals of the international community at this time must be the restoration of a climate of peace and security and the creation of the conditions that are necessary for the building by the Iraqi people of a peaceful, secure and prosperous society. The United Nations has a pivotal role to play with regard to both nation-building and the political transition in Iraq. We therefore call for greater coherence among the members of the Security Council, and urge them to adopt such measures as are necessary in the security interests of all concerned to bring that situation within the parameters of international political legitimacy and so give free rein to the aspirations of the Iraqi people.

Threats to international peace and security are certainly not posed by State actors exclusively. The activities of organized criminal groups engaged in the illegal drug trade and in the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons pose a serious threat to the peace and stability of some States, despite the efforts made at all levels.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, Governments the world over have joined forces even more resolutely in their condemnation of terrorism and have endeavoured to give effect to all the measures called for in the relevant decisions of the Security Council, including by subscribing to all international treaties aimed at combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The international community must, however, also turn its attention once more to

addressing the root causes of this now-global phenomenon with a view to alleviating — if not removing altogether — the more pressing concerns that provide a basis for acts of terror.

Even as we remain resolute in the war on terrorism, and focus on the traditional issues of peace and security, we must be mindful of the need to make progress on the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals, which world leaders outlined at the Millennium Summit in 2000. The challenges we face are not confined to the issues of peace and security as defined in their traditional sense. Indeed, success in dealing with threats to international peace and security may ultimately depend on the progress we make in overcoming poverty and in dealing with injustice, intolerance, deprivation and diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of those non-conventional threats that are fast approaching global crises. Even though Africa remains the hardest hit, the disease is spreading fast in Asia and in Eastern Europe. In the Caribbean — which is second only to sub-Saharan Africa in HIV/AIDS prevalence rates — HIV/AIDS is a major development challenge threatening to reverse years of hard-won human development gains and increase poverty levels. The General Assembly has just concluded a high-level debate on HIV/AIDS, and my delegation trusts that that meeting will provide the necessary impetus and lay the groundwork for further meaningful support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Unless those with the capacity to contribute come forward with additional resources, many, many more lives will surely be lost.

Without a secure and peaceful international environment, and in the absence of a sustained effort on the part of our development partners to live up to the commitments made at major United Nations conferences, there can be no meaningful and sustained global economic advancement for Africa as it seeks to implement the New Partnership for Africa's Development, or for the least developed countries, the landlocked countries or the small island developing States.

Trinidad and Tobago continues to attach high importance to the need for the international community to pay special attention to the unique challenges and problems which confront small island developing States and to full and effective implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It is for that reason that we participated actively last year in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. We were pleased that the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation reinforced the view that small island developing States are a special case in terms of both the environment and development.

The Johannesburg Summit also recognized that, although small island developing States continue to take the lead in the path towards sustainable development, they remain increasingly constrained by the interplay of adverse factors such as their small size, fragility, isolation and vulnerability.

It is for this reason that Trinidad and Tobago will play host next week to the Caribbean small island developing States regional preparatory meeting, one of four regional meetings being held by small island developing States in order to identify and develop inputs for the review of the Barbados Programme of Action. Implementation has been the Achilles heel of the Programme of Action. Small island developing States have taken the lead in our efforts to achieve sustainable development. We need, however, the support of the international community.

We trust that the international meeting to review the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, to be held in Mauritius in 2004, will not only better enable us to evaluate the Barbados Programme of Action, but ultimately lead to an enhanced level of political commitment and increased financial and technical assistance for small island developing States on the part of the international community.

Another issue of the utmost concern to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, to all CARICOM Governments, is the continued trans-shipment of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea. The reassurances of adequate safeguards do not constitute guarantees against the potentially devastating impact of an accident on our economies and ecosystems. We therefore once more call upon the States concerned to cease this practice.

Recent events have also pointed to the challenges faced by many countries in the area of governance. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,

which was elected in recent multi-party elections that were peaceful, free and fair, is committed to efficient and transparent Government, to ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, to the devolution of resources and decision-making to the local levels of government, and to the meaningful participation of all its citizens in the formulation of public policy.

The Government has also set itself the goal of achieving developed country status by 2020, with the aim of providing to all its citizens by that date a high quality of life in all areas, including education, health, employment, housing, transportation, telecommunications, water and electricity. This the Government hopes to achieve by allocating a sizeable portion of its national budget to programmes of human-resource development and of economic infrastructure and institutional development, as well as social programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty.

But our national goals can only be achieved if our domestic efforts are complemented by efforts at the international level to achieve greater international economic stability and a more equitable distribution of resources among States, and if the benefits of free trade are more widely shared, particularly by those countries whose incorporation into the world economy places them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their developed country partners. The new opportunities occasioned by globalization and trade liberalization, which we consider to be a positive force for good, should be available to all, and not to just a privileged few. We must avoid further marginalization of the vulnerable States among us. Given the central role of trade in the achievement of economic expansion, the failure of the recent World Trade Organization meeting in Cancún to agree on issues critical to developing countries does not augur well for our future economic well-being or for that of the least developed, landlocked and small island developing States among us. We are hopeful for greater flexibility on the part of our developed countries' negotiating partners in Geneva next December, which is necessary if any progress is to be achieved.

The quest for economic and social justice for all peoples cannot be divorced from the fervent desire of all peoples to live in freedom and without fear for their lives. The growing religious and ethnic diversity of our societies highlights the ever-present need for mutual respect for and tolerance of the diversity that today is a characteristic of many communities. The lack of such tolerance and respect has fuelled once again in our lifetime the horrific crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

To deter the commission of such crimes in the future, and in order to deal with flagrant abuses of the fundamental human rights and freedom of the individual, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person, the international community established the International Criminal Court (ICC), which this year has made substantial progress in establishing its principal organs, through the election of its Judges, Chief Prosecutor, Deputy Prosecutor and the Registrar.

The ICC does not represent victor's justice, but a universal and shared symbol of morality based on the fundamental principle that those individuals who commit the serious crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court will, with the broad support of the international community, be brought to trial before such a tribunal, but only where their national Governments are unable or unwilling to do so.

Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the efficient and effective functioning of this permanent International Criminal Court, and deplores all efforts to undermine its integrity and the commitment of its States Parties to carry out in good faith the obligations into which they have freely entered through their adherence to the Rome Statute of the ICC. We call for wider adherence to the Statute by all States, so that it may one day have universal application. Only a universal commitment by all States to strive to eliminate the culture of impunity for such heinous crimes will successfully stem the tide of the horrific events that continue to mar our world.

Several speakers in this general debate have referred to the crisis in multilateralism and the need for the reform of the United Nations to make it more relevant to present day realities. It is in this context that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago welcomes the call made by the Secretary-General in his statement to the General Assembly on 23 September for a thorough restructuring of the post-Second-World-War institutional architecture of the United Nations through the reform and strengthening of its major organs. His stated intention to pursue an approach through the modality of a panel of eminent persons enjoys the full support of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We would not wish at this time,

to prejudge the outcome of the work of such a panel, but would hope that it will recognize the role that small States play in international affairs.

We expect the panel's final recommendations to take the form of specific proposals for amendments to the Charter that will be able to command the widest possible support of the international community at the highest political levels. The reform exercise must have as its ultimate objective the strengthening of the United Nations and an enhancement of its capacity to respond to the new global challenges.

We must also ensure that the long overdue reform of the Security Council takes place. Expansion of the Council's membership to make it more democratic and representative can only confer greater legitimacy on the Council and on the Organization as a whole.

Most importantly, we must better empower the General Assembly, the most representative of all the organs of the United Nations, to play its role more effectively as the chief deliberative and policy-making organ of the Organization.

No other institution has the inclusiveness or the legitimacy that the United Nations has. We must therefore spare no effort to make it a more effective instrument in the service of all the peoples of the world.

In conclusion, the stark international situation calls for more, not less, international cooperation in facing the countless challenges that confront countries large and small. We must seek to implement urgently new and better policies aimed at the prevention of armed conflict. We must make fuller use of the few opportunities for economic and social progress that present themselves. We must demonstrate the necessary political will to maintain a peaceful and secure international environment that is conducive to the uplifting and well-being of all humanity.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rogatien Biaou, Minister for Foreign Affairs and African Integration of the Republic of Benin.

**Mr. Biaou** (Benin) *(spoke in French)*: Mr. President, you have the honour and privilege of guiding the work of the General Assembly at a time when the United Nations is at a crossroads. The international situation is marked today by doubt, anguish and disillusionment. Faced with the many conflicts and acts of terrorism that beset our world, and with the constant disquieting increase in poverty, we must acknowledge that the end of ideological confrontation did not bring the world either peace or the development so hoped for by the founding fathers of this Organization. Therefore, in conveying my heartfelt and warm congratulations to you on your election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth regular session, I would like in particular to convey my wishes for courage and success in discharging this noble mission and assure you of the support of my country, Benin.

My delegation would also like to convey a well-deserved tribute, to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, and to congratulate him on the results obtained during his presidency in defining modalities for implementing the outcomes of the major conferences held under the aegis of the United Nations.

Allow me also to congratulate, in particular, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on the courage, skill and resolve with which he is guiding our Organization, an irreplaceable instrument for the promotion and maintenance of world peace.

My delegation is grateful to him for his constancy in dealing with events that shook our universal Organization during this year. He understood how to bring the necessary clear-sightedness, with his unshakeable faith in the ability of the international community, to provide a concerted response to urgent problems of our time while rejecting any confusion of roles. In so doing he saved our Organization from scorn and collapse.

*Mr. Swe (Myanmar), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Whenever the United Nations has been called into question, faced with a challenge to its very existence, it has stood up and reaffirmed its usefulness in managing situations as the guarantor of international law.

The terrorist attacks against the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, which caused many casualties, profoundly shocked and enraged the people and Government of Benin. The United Nations does not deserve this kind of gratuitous barbarity perpetrated against its staff, who are devoted to the cause of rebuilding Iraq.

Benin reiterates its sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello as well as to the

families of all the other victims of the explosion. We once again convey to them our solidarity and support.

My country reiterates to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and his associates our admiration for the courage and conviction with which, every day, they do their jobs. This act should not shake their firm determination to defend the cause of humanity, and should be a new source of commitment to attain the goals of the United Nations.

Our support for the United Nations and the Secretary-General is based on Benin's commitment to multilateralism, which is and must remain the linchpin for the new order that the international community is striving to build.

If there is one area in which our Organization has made some progress in strengthening its effectiveness, it is in the prevention, management and settlement of armed conflicts. It has given real meaning to its action in this area by clearly defining modalities for implementing peacekeeping operations.

My country endorses the conclusions and recommendations of the Secretary-General on conflict prevention, particularly in the areas of poverty eradication, transparency in the area of arms, the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and weapons of mass destruction and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The gravity of the situation prevailing in Africa makes the continent a central concern of the international community. Given the seriousness of Africa's problems, the United Nations and its Member States owe it to themselves to step up their support for African initiatives to reverse negative tendencies and to avoid any prolonged destabilization of the continent.

At its recent summit held in Maputo, Mozambique, the African Union gave a forceful demonstration of its resolve to acquire the means to tackle its problems. The conference elected all the senior officials of the African Union Commission. The new team should strive to develop and maintain relations of partnership with the world, based on Africa's priorities. Benin hopes that this new team will enjoy the trust and support of the international community in order to restore peace on the continent by eliminating various pockets of tension and through the promotion and implementation of development programmes.

We also commend the work done in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which embodies the hope for the revitalization of the continent through combined synergies produced by implementation of the main points of this programme, which is based upon consensus.

The importance accorded by the G-8 to the promotion of peace and stability in Africa is an important step forward. This new commitment will give Africa the means to contain the many conflicts and latent crises that are fraught with serious danger and unimaginable consequences. Benin is prepared to cooperate to establish this work plan so that by 2010 Africa will have an inter-African peacekeeping force, an essential instrument for political stability, without which Africa would be unable to tackle urgent tasks of economic and social development. The Security Council missions to Central Africa and West Africa in June and July this year highlighted the crucial need to have this mechanism as a permanent presence.

Developments in Africa since our fifty-seventh session, and the facts gathered on the ground by the Council missions reaffirm one unavoidable fact, that the effective mobilization and rapid deployment of troops to the field is decisive in managing armed conflicts in Africa, as indeed it is everywhere else on our planet.

The speedy reaction of the international community was crucial in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, where Operation Licorne and the deployment of the contingent of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI), made it possible to help warring brothers to silence their arms and embark on a dialogue in order to preserve the territorial integrity of Côte d'Ivoire.

The restoration of calm should not lead us to underestimate the seriousness of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, where the political crisis is far from over. Major problems remain to be resolved, and it is important that an international military presence be maintained in Côte d'Ivoire in order to maintain conditions conducive to dialogue regarding implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis agreements for a return to normality.

Furthermore, the rapid reaction by the Central African States and Nigeria made it possible to put an

end to the coup d'état in Sao Tome and Principe and to return to power the democratically elected President.

Likewise, just a few weeks ago in Guinea-Bissau, immediate action and initiatives taken by ECOWAS prompted the perpetrators of the coup d'état to enter into a negotiating process aimed at a short transition leading up to the organization of presidential and legislative elections.

The authorization to send a multinational force and a United Nations stabilization force to Liberia, under Chapter VII of the Charter, gave a clear signal of the international community's determination to end the conflict there. The impact of these steps is very encouraging, and we welcome the signing, in Accra on 18 August this year, of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Recent political developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have continuously highlighted the importance of the need to hold an international conference on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

The complexity of phenomena in Africa requires the Secretary-General to maintain an ongoing dialogue with African leaders and to adopt common approaches to relevant issues. That is why Benin welcomes the establishment of the Office and the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General as the Special Adviser on Africa.

The implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), a genuinely African initiative, has made significant progress this year. It has become increasingly detailed in programme design and in its specific projects for agriculture, the environment, energy and information and communications technologies. The involvement of civil society has been effective in expanding the social basis of NEPAD and as a way of involving peoples in its implementation. Benin urgently appeals to the international community to enhance its support for NEPAD, as it did in Tokyo in the context of the Third Tokyo International Conference on African Development.

In this regard, it is important that the United Nations operational activities be buttressed by strategies based on effective partnership with all stakeholders in the development process. They must help implement concrete projects that have a real impact on the living and working conditions of peoples with a view to poverty eradication. Indeed, the annual rise in the number of poor people in the world has become increasingly distressing. It makes us question ever more deeply the current world order and the sincerity of the determination of the international community — in particular, that of the development institutions and the rich countries — to combat poverty and to promote genuine sustainable development.

It is true that the absence of democracy, corruption and poor governance are tragic scourges in that they exacerbate poverty and impede development. There is no doubt, however, that the least developed countries have undertaken extremely courageous economic and political reforms at the cost of enormous sacrifices made by their populations. That is why we remain concerned by the low rate of implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries and call on the international community and our bilateral and multilateral partners to demonstrate greater solidarity and responsibility. My Government strongly favours a substantial increase in resources made available to the various assistance funds, in particular the United Nations Capital Development Fund, which is working to eliminate poverty.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ended less than a month ago in Cancún. My country, Benin, which is the Chairman of the Coordination Bureau for the Least Developed Countries, attended with the firm determination to establish a candid and constructive dialogue with the developed countries. The goal was to find a solution to the dysfunctional free trade system, which prevents the developing countries, particularly the least developed among them, from enjoying their comparative advantages in the agricultural sector. The sectoral initiative on cotton introduced by Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad targeted that specific issue.

History will record the Conference as a failure. My delegation nevertheless believes that, despite the difficulties, Cancún moved the negotiations forward. It was an opportunity for the least developed countries to state some of their concerns, in particular those related to the practice of subsidizing non-competitive agricultural producers. This practice is literally strangling the cotton growers of the underdeveloped countries, particularly in West Africa.

Benin should like to reopen discussions so that the trade negotiations begun in Doha can effectively offer new prospects for the development of the least developed countries. We must establish transparent pricing on the world market and open up markets in order to allow competitive countries to produce and sell their products at remunerative prices. This is of tremendous importance to African cotton-producing countries, because the future of a sector that has been developed at great cost, with the assistance of the international community, is at stake. Our Organization would gain in credibility if it could find a way to guarantee our peoples their right to subsistence.

Indeed, who on this Earth has never worn a cotton shirt, dress or loincloth? Who among us here has never used cotton to clean or bind a wound? The progressive disappearance of the cotton sector will have unimaginable implications and consequences for our comfort in clothing and other needs of all humankind. The time has come, therefore, for the developed countries to hear the voice of the poor peasants labouring under the sun and rain in Africa. While globalization may require considerable structural adjustments, it is increasingly necessary that its concomitant sacrifices be parcelled out fairly. This will require the rich countries to assume their responsibility to give the peoples of the least developed countries a chance at survival.

In 2004, the international community will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. That will be an important event, to which my delegation should like to draw the attention of the international community in order to spotlight the role of the family in our society and the part it can play in meeting contemporary challenges. To that end, Benin proposes the convening of a regional African conference in 2004 and calls for the support of the Secretariat for such an event.

At the national level, since our last session Benin has met two significant challenges in the entrenchment of our democratic process launched in February 1990. The decentralization of our territorial administration was achieved following our municipal and communal elections of December 2002. Those elections marked the conclusion of a fundamental reform of State administration in Benin, which is now structured around decentralized, financially autonomous communes led by elected mayors who are accountable to the people. This reform has created the optimal conditions for grass-roots democracy and has allowed the people to participate actively in public administration and thus to become real stakeholders in local community development. Elections for deputies to the fourth legislature were also held in March 2003. These two elections were free, transparent and democratic. They took place calmly and peacefully. They made a further contribution to strengthening the democratic rebirth of Benin.

These concrete achievements attest to the vitality and stability of our national institutions and to their effective contribution to the ongoing strengthening of the constitutional order in Benin. This historic opportunity for Benin to enjoy peace and stability in a subregion beset by recurring internal armed conflicts implies a certain responsibility with regard to our contribution to the international community's efforts to promote democracy throughout the world and to restore peace in countries in conflict, particularly in Africa.

It was in recognition of this firm commitment of Benin's that the General Assembly entrusted us with the organization, from 4 to 6 December 2000, of the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies. For nearly three years, Benin chaired the follow-up mechanism to that Conference; it recently transferred that chairmanship to Mongolia, which organized the Fifth Conference from 10 to 12 September 2003. My country welcomes the outcome of the Ulan Bator Conference. We remain committed to the principle of periodic assessment of democratic practices. We will spare no effort in implementing the Ulam Bator Declaration and Plan of Action.

The active and effective participation of Benin in peacekeeping operations decided upon or authorized by the Security Council also makes clear my country's resolute commitment to democracy, the maintenance of peace and security in the world and international solidarity. It is in that context that Benin's candidacy for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council for 2004 and 2005 should be seen. In that context, Benin will resolutely strive to strengthen the crucial partnership that the Security Council is endeavouring to establish with regional and subregional organizations in the area of peacekeeping. Benin is counting on the support of the entire international community so that we can have the privilege of serving, at such a high level, the cause of peace and international security.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Said Abdella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea.

**Mr. Abdella** (Eritrea) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like to begin by extending to Mr. Julian Hunte sincere congratulations on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. The Eritrean delegation is convinced that, under his wise guidance, this session will address, with vision and courage, the challenging issues that are confronting the world.

My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to express appreciation and thanks to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the wisdom and skill he displayed in leading the session to a successful conclusion. We also pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for his steadfast commitment to the cause of peace and development — the twin pillars of the United Nations Charter.

Eritrea pays tribute to and thanks the facilitators and guarantors of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and its partners, the troop- and observer-contributing countries, as well as donor countries, for the assistance they generously extended to ensure the success of the peace process. It also urges them not to be discouraged by the recent negative developments and to continue their assistance, which is essential for the achievement of peace and security in our region.

Eritrea would like to bring to the Assembly's attention the dangerous developments that are threatening to destroy the peace process between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In a message communicated to the Secretary-General, on 19 September 2003, Ethiopia officially rejected the decision of the Boundary Commission and threatened to unleash another war of aggression against Eritrea if the terms and conditions it had set were not met.

It should be recalled that Ethiopia declared war on Eritrea in 1998 because it claimed ownership of the sovereign Eritrean town of Badme. At that time, we made every possible diplomatic effort to prevent an unwarranted and unjustifiable war — prior to and in the aftermath of Ethiopia's official declaration of war. Unfortunately, that sent the wrong signal to Ethiopia and prompted the regime in power to pursue — with impunity — its policy of belligerence, and to unleash successive military offensives that that resulted in a great loss of life and the destruction of property.

After a cycle of senseless and bloody military clashes, reason prevailed, with the signing of the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Algiers in June and December 2000, respectively. A Boundary Commission, empowered to be the final arbiter for the boundary claims, was subsequently created. The Commission announced its final and binding decision on 13 April 2002. Badme was confirmed by the Commission's decision as being sovereign Eritrean territory.

In spite of its treaty obligations to respect and duly implement the final and binding decision of the Boundary Commission, however, Ethiopia has chosen to flout international law and practice. Thus, its rejection of the entire decision and its denunciation of the Commission follow a series of major violations of the Algiers Agreements, including the illegal deployment of troops and the building of settlements in sovereign Eritrean territory, the aggravation of the suffering of over 60,000 Eritrean citizens, who remain displaced from their home villages in the temporary security zone, and the delay of demarcation because of obstructions caused by its tactics to prevent preparatory field work. That has resulted in huge financial cost to the international community.

As most Members will have been informed by now, the Ethiopian Prime Minister declared, in a letter of 19 September to the Secretary-General, that the boundary demarcation process is "in terminal crisis". The Prime Minister heaped insults on the Boundary Commission, dismissed its judgement as "totally illegal, unjust and irresponsible" and called on the Security Council to set up "an alternative mechanism" to demarcate the contested parts of the boundary. He further suggested that UNMEE should pack up and leave, and pleaded for international recognition and endorsement of Ethiopia's occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories.

Ethiopia's provocative letter represents nothing less than an unprecedented assault on the fundamental principles of international law and the key tenets of the Algiers peace agreements, as well as Security Council resolution 1507 (2003). It is full of blatant lies and distortions in its account of the legal principles and

findings that the Boundary Commission invoked in determining the location of Badme.

The Prime Minister's letter contrasts sharply with the public statement of his Government when the Boundary Commission announced its decision on 13 April 2002. At that time, Ethiopia urged the international community to put intense pressure on Eritrea to accept and implement the decision of the Boundary Commission fully and faithfully. It declared full legal victory and even bragged about its "successful litigation strategy that hinged on a maximalist approach" of exaggerating its claims to include territories that never belonged to it. This blatant revelation, which is in fact true, was repeated by both the Prime Minister and his Minister for Foreign Affairs in a report to the Ethiopian Parliament as recently as last month.

Let me now briefly address some of the issues raised in the Ethiopian letter.

First, article 4.2 of the Algiers Peace Agreement unambiguously states that:

> "a neutral Boundary Commission composed of five members shall be established with a mandate to delimit and demarcate the colonial treaty border based on the pertinent colonial treaties (1900, 1902, 1908) and applicable international law."

Article 4.15 further states:

> "The parties agree that the delimitation and demarcation determinations of the Commission shall be final and binding. Each party shall respect the border so determined, as well as the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the other party".

Therefore, Ethiopia cannot thus arbitrarily and unilaterally discard these key provisions of the peace agreement or urge the Security Council to set up a new mechanism.

Secondly, the Temporary Security Zone was never intended or set up to create a provisional boundary. Article 10 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement specifically states that this will not prejudge the final status of the contested areas, which will be determined at the end of the delimitation and demarcation of the boundary. In this regard, it is instructive to note that the Boundary Commission had notified both parties, in its delimitation decision of 13 April 2002, to recognize and respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity as determined by the delimitation decision pending demarcation on the ground. The boundary is thus already determined. This is reinforced by Security Council resolution 1507 (2003), which calls on both parties to recognize and respect each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Ethiopia's ludicrous suggestion of "recognizing the southern boundary of the Temporary Security Zone" as the boundary between the two countries" thus represents a flagrant violation of the Algiers Peace Agreements and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, UNMEE's mandate shall terminate when the delimitation-demarcation process of the border has been completed, pursuant to article 5 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Ethiopia will again commit a gross violation of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement if, as it has intimated in its letter, it requests UNMEE to leave before completing its task. Obviously, Ethiopia's primary concern is not the financial burden that UNMEE's prolonged presence would entail for the international community.

Ethiopia is, in fact, guilty of a litany of obstructions and violations that have in the past prevented expeditious demarcation. It cannot now shed crocodile tears or preach to the international community on ways and means of reducing financial costs. If this is a thinly veiled threat meant to convey to us its intentions of unleashing war, our response is that Ethiopia will be the sole party responsible for endangering regional peace and stability.

As the main guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement, the Security Council has legal treaty obligations to prevent war. Indeed, in accordance with article 14 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, the Security Council should urgently consider Ethiopia's flagrant violations of the Algiers Peace Agreement and take appropriate measures under Article VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Fourthly, Ethiopian leaders also argue that

> "the people of Ethiopia will not accept the decisions of the Boundary Commission [and that] Ethiopia will be embroiled in a political crisis and civil war if we accept the decision".

These hackneyed arguments have been used by previous Ethiopian leaders to justify their wars of aggression. The truth is that the people of Ethiopia have enjoyed internal harmony only when they were at peace with Eritrea. Whenever it has been at war with Eritrea, Ethiopia has become a source of instability in the region, and its people the victims of recurrent famines and pestilence. Also, such declarations must ring an alarm bell, because they are similar, if not identical, to statements made by those leaders who embroiled Europe in the Second World War.

In our view, Ethiopia's leaders have assumed their lawlessness and aggressive invasion policy because they have been emboldened by past patterns of unjustifiable tolerance by the international community. No action was taken against Ethiopia when it violated the moratorium on air strikes brokered by the United States and launched its second offensive in February 1999. No action was taken against Ethiopia when, in violation of the technical arrangements forged by the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and considered final and binding, it launched its third offensive in May 2000. Ethiopia has now reached the apex of its record of lawlessness, contempt for the rule of law, treaty obligations and the Charter of the United Nations by rejecting the final and binding decision of an Arbitration Commission. How long will this culture of impunity continue? When is the world going to say, "Enough is enough" and invoke article 14 of the Algiers Agreement?

Article 14 of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement states clearly, inter alia, that

> "OAU and the United Nations commit themselves to guarantee the respect for this commitment of the two parties until the determination of the common border on the basis of pertinent colonial treaties and applicable international law ... This guarantee shall be comprised of:
>
> "(a) Measures to be taken by the international community should one or both of the parties violate this commitment, including appropriate measures to be taken under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations by the United Nations Security Council".

Should not the United Nations and the international community now take these actions in the name of justice and the Charter of the United Nations?

The international community has already invested too much — in financial and in political terms — to help bring about a legal and peaceful resolution of the dispute. The political and financial leverage of the international community, as well as the instruments of persuasion at its disposal, are also substantial, as Ethiopia continues to receive lavish development assistance from multilateral and bilateral partners. Yet, while all the ingredients and safeguards of success are there, the danger of failure of the peace process is now distinct due to the failure of the international community to take seriously its obligations under this agreement and to take effective preventive measures. Unless appropriate action is taken now, before the situation explodes, crisis management will be too late and will not be worth the effort.

In this spirit, the Eritrean delegation appeals to the General Assembly and to the international community to take necessary and timely actions to ensure that peace and security prevail in our region.

The obligations of the international community are clear, while the measures at its disposal are expressly spelled out in the Algiers Agreement.

Despite international guarantees, Ethiopia has chosen to blatantly violate international law and its solemnly signed treaty obligations. Since 19 September, when Ethiopia wilfully crossed a red line, it has set in motion an irreversible process to scuttle altogether the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Government of the State of Eritrea. That is an affront not only to Eritrea but also to the international community as a whole, and in particular to the United Nations and the Security Council.

In his report (S/2003/257) to the Security Council earlier this year, Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed his concern that the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace process was "at a critical stage". The situation can now be considered explosive, paving the way — as Ethiopian leaders seem to wish — to renewed conflict, with its attendant horrific consequences, unless the international community acts promptly and decisively.

The harmful effects of Ethiopia's lawlessness will not be limited to Eritrea. They will impinge on the legitimacy and credibility of the United Nations and mock its core values, if only because they violate the hallowed injunction that States, big and small, need to

observe the basic principles of international law and the sanctity of legal agreements, and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

In conclusion, the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia have been denied peace for three decades. That has had a devastating effect on their economies. They deserve peace and development, which are now recognized as human rights. Yet such peace can be guaranteed only by respect for the rule of law, the sanctity of agreements and the sovereignty and territorial integrity established by arbitration decisions made on the basis of legal agreements. Eritrea has always been, and will continue to be, committed to such peace. It is now up to the international community, and in particular the Security Council, to uphold those principles and values. In essence, Ethiopia is no longer in conflict with Eritrea, but with the Charter, which the Security Council must uphold as it has done in several similar cases.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mamadou Bamba, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte d'Ivoire.

**Mr. Bamba** (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I have the great honour of conveying to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session the greetings of the people of Côte d'Ivoire, President Laurent Gbagbo, Prime Minister Seydou Elimane Diarra and the Government.

The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire has the pleasure of warmly congratulating the President of the General Assembly on his election. We wish him every success as he carries out the lofty and important tasks entrusted to him by the Member States of the Organization. His election is a testament to the international community's recognition of the vibrancy and diplomacy of Saint Lucia — the President's very beautiful country — in working for the ideals of the United Nations. His election is also a tribute to his skills as a diplomat, and an illustration of the fact that all countries are treated equally at the United Nations, which I welcome and I assure the President of the cooperation of my delegation.

I am also pleased to convey the gratitude of the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire to Mr. Jan Kavan, President of the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, for the skill and mastery with which he guided the Assembly's work.

I take this opportunity to once again express to the Secretary-General, the United Nations and the bereaved families the sincere condolences of the people of Côte d'Ivoire on the tragic death of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, other United Nations staff members and all other persons killed or wounded in the fight for peace and justice.

I also take this opportunity to reaffirm the appreciation of the people and Government of Côte d'Ivoire for the work of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who works tirelessly for peace in the world and in Africa and who makes every effort to lend his personal support, as well as that of the Organization, to the restoration of peace in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire was once a model of stability and a haven of peace that enjoyed relative economic prosperity. However, for almost a decade it experienced a hidden crisis that led to the coup d'état of 24 December 1999, followed on 19 September 2002 by another attempted coup d'état that quickly became an armed rebellion. It was backed by foreign elements whose aim was to undermine our republican institutions and the democratically elected Government. That crisis did enormous harm to the population of Côte d'Ivoire and to all who had chosen to live in our country and to freely carry out their activities there.

A round table, held upon the initiative of France, brought together the various political forces of Côte d'Ivoire, leading to what is now known as the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. The Agreement — to which the United Nations gave formal international recognition through Security Council resolution 1464 (2003), after it had been endorsed by heads of State and leaders of international institutions meeting at the Kléber conference centre in Paris — provides for, among other things, the establishment of a Government of national reconciliation headed by a consensus Prime Minister with the necessary executive powers to implement the Agreement.

The Government of National Reconciliation, established on 13 March 2003, has made significant progress, including the 3 May 2003 signing of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement between the Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) and the Forces nouvelles — the former armed rebellion; the establishment of a consensus national disarmament,

demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme; the normalization of relations between Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbours, including the reopening of rail service from Abidjan to Ouagadougou; the 4 July 2003 joint declaration by the two parties of an end to hostilities; and, above all, the passing of an amnesty law on 6 August 2003. It should be pointed out that that law does not provide amnesty for common crimes and offences, including crimes related to violations of human rights, which must be investigated.

With regard to human rights, Côte d'Ivoire, despite the severe crisis it is experiencing, has constantly placed respect for the human person at the centre of its concerns. In addition, despite its meagre financial capacity, it has been tireless in pursuing its original policy of welcoming refugees, whose numbers have increased due to the crisis in neighbouring Liberia. Increased financial support from the international community is needed to share that heavy burden. My country must simultaneously guarantee the repatriation of the many Ivorian refugees in a number of neighbouring countries.

Here, I am pleased to mention that Côte d'Ivoire has ratified all instruments relative to the protection and promotion of human rights and, on 5 August 2002 — even before the crisis had occurred — created a Ministry devoted exclusively to human rights. Moreover, in view of massive human rights violations, Côte d'Ivoire formally requested on 5 November 2002 that an impartial United Nations fact-finding mission be sent to verify such violations throughout its territory in order to combat impunity.

Thus, after having at the same time consulted the African Commission on Human and People's Rights — whose first high-level fact-finding mission had already visited Côte d'Ivoire in April 2003, following the United Nations mission dispatched by the Secretary-General at the request of the President of the Republic — Côte d'Ivoire, in order to demonstrate its full cooperation with the various mechanisms of the Commission on Human and People's Rights, hastened to ensure positive follow-up with proposed dates for visits by the following: the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons and by the Special Rapporteurs of the Commission on Human Rights on Contemporary Forms of Racism and Racial Discrimination; on Xenophobia and Related Intolerance; on the Right to Freedom of Opinion; on the Human Rights of Migrants; and, recently, on the Use of Mercenaries. The fact that it is temporarily impossible for our Administration and for the Special Rapporteurs to travel throughout the territory to verify the facts — together with the cries of distress of the people in those areas — is a challenge to the international community. I must commend the international community's firm commitment and immense efforts to extricate Côte d'Ivoire from this crisis.

Coming back to the progress achieved on the path to peace, I am pleased to note the 12 September 2003 appointment, after long and difficult negotiations, of the Ministers of Defence and of Security, which paves the way for implementation of the national programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) established by the Government of National Reconciliation. To that end, a disarmament committee and another committee responsible for reunification have been established. In those ways, the Government intends to show its resolve to work for a return to peace.

However, despite such encouraging results, we must acknowledge that the path of peace is fraught with pitfalls. The current difficulties prove that the process of peace and national reconciliation remains fragile. Still, the inter-Ivorian dialogue is continuing, and all of the forces recognize that the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement is the only solution providing a way out of the Ivorian crisis.

In that connection, Côte d'Ivoire welcomes the firm commitment of the United States to Liberia in supporting the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to help that fraternal country exorcise the demons of war and division. In Côte d'Ivoire, as in Liberia, the DDR programme remains of paramount importance to that end. Indeed, the Government attaches particular importance to the DDR programme, which, by re-establishing security and restoring territorial integrity, will enable Côte d'Ivoire to organize transparent and fair elections in 2005, under international supervision.

On behalf of the Ivorian Government, I should like to take advantage of this rostrum once again to thank the international community — particularly the heads of State of the ECOWAS countries and the President and the Government of France — for its unwavering support for the peace effort in Côte d'Ivoire.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the international situation and the problems afflicting it, including the current pandemics of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; armed conflicts; disarmament; terrorism; and comprehensive human development. Indeed, we note that, although HIV/AIDS affects 20 million people in Africa — two thirds of those infected worldwide — malaria continues to have at least an equal effect on the continent's mortality rate. To make matters even worse, tuberculosis is showing signs of a disturbing resurgence.

The establishment of the United Nations Global Fund to fight these three pandemics — amounting to $10.4 million — therefore provides genuine grounds for encouragement and hope for affected populations, particularly in countries of the third world. However, we hope that the Fund's endowment will increase and that it will swiftly become operational and more easily accessible to countries that are already hard hit by these scourges and that — ironically enough — are also the chief theatres of armed conflicts.

It is paradoxical to note that such conflicts are increasing in number, frequency and intensity — particularly in Africa — even as the modes and modalities for their management by the United Nations and by regional and subregional organizations are being strengthened, diversified and improved. Côte d'Ivoire therefore congratulates the Organization and its dedicated Secretary-General, as well as regional countries and organizations, on the results already achieved in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and the Great Lakes region, to cite just the most recent cases. Those results encourage all the parties concerned to persevere in the effort to re-establish and consolidate peace in all these war-torn areas.

Concerning the situations in Iraq and in Afghanistan, my country hopes for a swift return to peace and security so that their respective peoples — who have suffered much over the past decade — will be able to devote their efforts to economic and social progress.

In the Middle East, Côte d'Ivoire appeals for moderation on both sides and for compliance with the road map, which is the way back to peace in that part of the world.

In any event, law must always prevail over violence, and dialogue — under the aegis of the international community — must always be the favoured tool for resolving disputes.

Conflicts are the work of, inter alia, armed gangs, the unemployed, the marginalized and deserters who feed the flourishing market for mercenaries in Africa in general and in our subregion in particular. Mercenarism, together with the proliferation of and illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, is a dangerous threat to the peace and stability of our countries. Those scourges — along with terrorism, which sadly continues to claim its victims — demand special attention from the international community.

The Assembly must undertake concrete measures in the fight against these destabilizing factors in the world, particularly in Africa. The implementation of the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects — whose review last July revealed an increasing universal awareness of the danger of proliferation and the need to take coordinated actions to control it — will be an important step forward if we have the necessary political will. The measures undertaken at the regional and subregional levels — particularly the ECOWAS Moratorium and the assistance provided by the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development in Africa and by other entities — are elements leading in the right direction.

Likewise, the Assembly should activate and give fresh impetus to regional and international convention and encourage the standardization of legislation to effectively fight the phenomenon of mercenarism. Côte d'Ivoire endorses the proposal to draw up and establish — within the framework of ECOWAS — a general plan for stabilization in the subregion, which, I am convinced, would contribute to a return to lasting peace and stability in West Africa.

Preventive action must also be taken at several levels. At the political and diplomatic level, the international community should devote greater attention to preventive diplomacy, because it is essential that the outbreak of conflict be prevented through an early-warning system. At the economic and social level, the fight against poverty must be continued, particularly by integrating the unemployed and other marginalized people into economic structures.

At the cultural level, education for peace, expanding sporting and cultural exchanges, meetings among groups of women and young people, at the level of each State and among the various countries, can promote tolerance and mutual understanding among peoples in the context of a dialogue among civilizations.

The globalization of the economy may be a factor for progress by favouring competitiveness, bringing to the market the best products at the most competitive prices. Sadly, such globalization could also impede the development of poor countries, which suffer from fluctuations in the price of their products on the international market and, moreover, must cope with unfair competition imposed by States that subsidize their export items.

Given these mixed results, the recent Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization in Cancún helped to gauge the magnitude of the ruinous consequences for African farmers of the subsidies given to producers in the North. By breaking the rules of free competition, the industrialized countries have enabled the richest producers to thrive while impoverishing those that are struggling for survival. This dire situation should cause us to examine our conscience so that together we may seek ways and means to redress this injustice.

There is also an urgent need to take action to stabilize commodity prices at a profitable rate.

If poor countries are to escape the vicious circle of poverty, there must be fair remuneration for the work of their farmers, complemented by an increase in official development assistance, which should reach 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of industrialized countries, and by debt cancellation.

Let us take the opportunity of the present session to reflect together on ways to strengthen North-South cooperation in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. In the framework of South-South cooperation, the most advanced countries should plan to increase trade and technology transfers to benefit less advantaged countries, in support of their own efforts.

We are concerned about the coordinated follow-up to the outcome of the major international conferences held under United Nations auspices. The fight against poverty cannot be won unless the recommendations adopted in the framework of those summits are implemented. It is no good expanding the forums for discussion if the conclusions concerning financing for development or technology transfer, in particular, cannot be implemented and used on the ground in a new spirit of genuine solidarity.

My country, Côte d'Ivoire, fervently wishes to see the advent of the new spirit of solidarity called for by globalization and the interdependence of our States, and also supports reform of the United Nations to make it democratic and efficient.

May we all have the wisdom to ensure that our resources and intelligence are put to the service of the building of a better world, where peace, solidarity and justice reign — a world that reflects the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Fernand Poukré-Kono, Chairman of the delegation of the Central African Republic.

**Mr. Poukré-Kono** (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I pay sincere tribute to the President on his election to preside over the Assembly at the fifty-eighth session, which is being held in a particularly important context in this century. His long experience and his expertise on international issues, as well as the role that his country, Saint Lucia, plays in the Caribbean region, guarantee that our work will be a success.

I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau, and cannot fail to commend the skill with which the President's distinguished predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, of the Czech Republic, conducted the work of the fifty-seventh session.

I reiterate to the Secretary-General the full support of the Transitional Government of the Central African Republic for his unceasing work at the head of the Organization to ensure peace and security in a world beset by terrorist threats and widespread insecurity.

The Central African Republic joins those who have honoured the memory of the United Nations personnel who fell victim to the wanton violent act of terrorism in Baghdad on 19 August, including Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and reiterates its sincere sympathy to the Secretary-General. We appreciate his decision to maintain the United Nations mission in Iraq, despite everything.

For a decade, the General Assembly has adopted many recommendations, whose implementation has not always brought solutions to our diverse shared concerns.

Before my delegation contributes its appraisal of the state of the world, against the backdrop of the many challenges of the twenty-first century, I would like, on behalf of His Excellency François Bozizé, President of the Central African Republic, and of the Republic's Government and people, to express the wish that our meetings may be crowned with success.

A world that cherishes peace, progress, solidarity and concord is the objective to which the entire world aspires and the main philosophy of the founding fathers of the United Nations. Indeed, when peace is not assured, various crises ensue. Aggravating factors like destitution, penury, extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, combined with intolerance, injustice, indifference and social inequality, greatly threaten the balance of peace in many regimes of the world, and particularly in the Central African Republic.

It was against this background that a surge in patriotism occurred on 15 March this year in the Central African Republic as the outcome of a process to which all the leading lights of the nation contributed. The situation that prevailed in my country before 15 March was the subject of several debates, and unsuccessful attempts at settlement, by the Security Council, the African Union's/Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CAEMC) and the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States. A number of bilateral initiatives also failed.

I reiterate once again the gratitude of the Government and people of the Central African Republic to the Secretary-General, the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in the Central African Republic, the Security Council members and particularly friendly countries, who generously contributed to supporting the Central African people at an extremely difficult time.

Since 15 March the resolve of the Transitional Government to work for a return to normal constitutional life has resulted in significant advances, in the framework of the implementation of commitments according to the following timetable: May 2003, establishment of the National Transition Council to replace Parliament;. September 2003, the holding of a national dialogue for the Central Africans to examine the deep causes of their long-standing confrontations; 2004, holding of a constitutional referendum; the third quarter of 2004, presidential elections; and fourth quarter of 2004, municipal and legislative elections.

This consensual transition, scheduled to end in January 2005, should establish security throughout the country, improve public finances and revive the economic and social sectors, which are engines of growth.

These main points of our overall policy and of the Transitional Government's economic and social recovery strategy now being implemented are supported and commended by the neighbouring countries in general, and in particular by the members of CAEMAC, which acknowledge the work of the new regime.

The member countries of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, at their nineteenth ministerial meeting, held in Brazzaville from 14 to 17 May this year, expressed their support for the change that had occurred in Bangui in a declaration, and appealed to the international community to provide assistance to the Central African Republic.

The exhaustive report of the situation before 15 March presented by the President of the Republic, His Excellency General François Bozizé, to the special summit of CAEMAC devoted exclusively to the situation in the Central African Republic led heads of State and of delegations to understand and support the Transitional Government's efforts to bring about a return to constitutional order. Clear signs of the significant progress in establishing national reconciliation and restoring constitutional and democratic order are the fruitful discussions with many friendly countries and partners, the consultations between the Central African Republic and the European Union which have been going on since 22 May, and the fact-finding visit to Bangui from 17 to 21 August of the Committee of Ambassadors of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States.

In his introductory report to the Millennium Summit, the Secretary-General recalled that people are the purpose of any activity. Nothing could be more true. My delegation would like to see the United

Nations regain its authority in order to help promote human rights, democracy and development throughout the world.

Protecting and guaranteeing human rights contributes to a country's national concord and to the strengthening of its democracy. This was so well understood by the Central African Republic that on 15 March we chose consensual governance, at the centre of which the well-being of the citizens and the protection and guarantee of their rights are the highest priorities.

Implementing this will require resources that permit the widespread promotion of human rights and social development. My delegation hopes that the United Nations will become more involved, at the beginning of this third millennium, in international action to create a true human rights culture. To do this, the United Nations needs to reform, renew itself and adapt to today's world. It will have to rationalize its procedures, methods and approaches to all questions within its purview.

It will be understood that my delegation would like to see the Security Council reformed, so that it may better discharge its noble mission. Even if the veto is not as abused as it was during the cold war, Security Council membership needs to be reformulated, both at the level of permanent membership and non-permanent membership, in order to reflect the new realities of our world. This is the view of the delegation of the Central African Republic.

The need for a new approach in relations between States means that we all need to make a real commitment. This led to the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union as an expression of the desire of Africa to meet, together with the United Nations, all the challenges of the twenty-first century. My country will spare no effort to promote this new dynamism.

**The Acting President**: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Klára Novotná, Chairperson of the Slovak Republic.

**Ms. Novotná** (Slovakia): I have the honour of addressing the General Assembly on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Eduard Kukan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

Slovakia as a European Union acceding country fully endorses the statement made by the Prime Minister of Italy on behalf of the European Union. The positions and ideas expressed in Mr. Berlusconi's address perfectly reflect the values of the Government and people of Slovakia. I will therefore concentrate only on the topics that we consider the most important.

At the outset, I warmly congratulate the President on his assumption of the presidency and wish him every success in discharging his important duties. He can rely on Slovakia's support and cooperation. Let me also add the voice of my delegation to those who have thanked his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, for his contribution to the work of this body.

Amongst the most challenging issues before us, the one that has drawn the closest attention of the world community is the situation in Iraq. We should join our efforts to help the Iraqi people reconstruct their country and build a democratic society, which is the best course of action for stabilizing the situation, which is still volatile on the ground.

The unprecedented tragedy of the destruction of the United Nations Baghdad headquarters, which ripped from our midst many brave United Nations personnel, including Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello, to whom we again pay our undivided tribute, has shown us that no target is safe. Uniting to help Iraq has become a matter of common interest.

Security Council resolution 1483 (2003) laid the important framework enabling the international community to contribute to Iraq's reconstruction. At the time of its adoption, Slovakia decided to participate in stabilization operations in Iraq by sending mine-clearing experts. Although this was only a token contribution, given our capacity and the number of Slovak troops already deployed in active peacekeeping missions around the globe, I believe that it showed our commitment to creating conditions in which the Iraqi people can build their own future. As more troops are needed on the ground, we support the efforts to win greater participation from willing countries. The United Nations, with a specific mandate, must play a greater role in the Iraqi post-war restoration.

Iraq must show that a free and democratic country is the inevitable replacement for dictatorship. A democratic and prosperous Iraq is important to peace and security in the Middle East, which directly affects the rest of the world.

The difficult economic and social situation in Afghanistan, where people continue to strive to build a democratic and viable society, still leaves room for a resurgence of extremists. The international community cannot move away from Afghanistan. It must stay committed and continue to provide the necessary assistance to the Afghan people. I am pleased to announce that last July the Slovak Parliament decided to extend the participation of Slovakia in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Ten years after Israelis and Palestinians astounded the world by signing the Oslo Accords, the two sides are again locked in a cycle of violence, attacks, counter-attacks and revenge. It is unfortunate that the latest wave of violence has come at a time when the road map had started to encourage feelings of hope.

Slovakia is deeply concerned over the deteriorating situation. Recent tragic and violent events have caused enormous suffering and resulted in many innocent victims. In the face of the current situation, both sides must act responsibly, with the utmost restraint, and consider carefully the tremendously negative consequences of a complete breakdown of the peace process. The only realistic way out of the impasse is the creation of a viable Palestinian State existing alongside Israel, with the security and survival of each guaranteed. Every effort has to be made to keep the road map on the table, because there is no other alternative. Both sides must fully and without further delay implement their obligations in accordance with the road map. Slovakia reiterates its support for the road map and sees the role of the Quartet in the peace process as irreplaceable and essential.

We will not relax our efforts in the fight against global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Underestimation of this peril could have a fateful impact on the international community. The United Nations must continue to play a decisive role in this fight. The Slovak Republic appreciates and fully supports the activities of the Counter-Terrorism Committee. Slovakia, as a party to all 12 global international conventions against terrorism, has successfully implemented their provisions into its legislation.

As a party to various international conventions and treaties, Slovakia supports joint efforts to adopt global international legal instruments and standards concerning the principle of the rule of law. The ratification process of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime is well under way in the Slovak Republic and should be completed by the end of this year.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed exponential growth in peacekeeping activities in an increasing number of conflicts throughout the globe. The recent comprehensive reform has significantly improved the effectiveness of planning and management of the ever more complex and challenging United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, the most important factor for the success of United Nations peacekeeping is still the political will of Member States and their readiness to contribute contingents and equipment. In order to support and sustain the increasing number of peacekeeping operations, the timely payment of financial contributions is necessary.

Slovakia has been among the leading contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations since it became a Member of the United Nations in 1993. Our peacekeepers are currently serving in six United Nations missions in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Given our clear understanding of the new threats to our security and a willingness and ability to help tackle them, our engagement in peace support operations around the world will expand even more when we join the European Union and NATO next year. Slovakia's active involvement in peacekeeping operations confirms the fact that the maintenance of international peace is among the priorities of our foreign policy.

In recent years attacks on humanitarian workers and on United Nations personnel have increased alarmingly. We therefore welcome the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1502 (2003) on the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel in conflict zones. It emphasizes the obligation of each Member State to take every step in its power to protect those working under the blue flag and to bring to justice those who attack or harm them. Slovakia has been a party to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel since 1996, and we invite those States that have not yet done so to become parties to this very important international legal instrument, which provides for the protection of United Nations and associated personnel.

One of the most important steps towards achieving international justice and putting an end to impunity for the most serious violations of human rights, war crimes and genocide was the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Slovakia, which is a State party to its Rome Statute, is firmly committed to ensuring that the Court is an independent, fair and effective institution. The election of 18 judges and of the Prosecutor and Deputy Prosecutor was essential for the successful start of its work. We are convinced that their expertise and moral integrity will ensure the highest standards in their performance and will guarantee fair and impartial justice.

Slovakia views arms control as a pivotal instrument of security policy. Here I would like to reiterate our continued support for the further strengthening of major international disarmament and non-proliferation instruments such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). It would be most appropriate to reinforce this cornerstone of nuclear non-proliferation by speedily bringing into force another significant instrument — the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) — hence my delegation's repeated call on those that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the CTBT as soon as possible.

Slovakia also encourages those countries that have not signed or ratified the Ottawa Convention to do so quickly. The terror that landmines cause, despite their limited military utility, continues to spread, along with the appalling humanitarian consequences of their use in actual conflicts.

With its entry into the European Union, Slovakia is taking on moral responsibility for the poorer countries of the world. Just as Slovakia received aid in the past, it is now in duty bound to help reduce social tensions and poverty in other parts of the world. That is our contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Slovakia is systematically and consistently preparing its compact and efficient development agenda. The Slovak Government has recently adopted a legal framework and strategy for development assistance. An important step in the development of official assistance was the approval of the first annual budget in December 2002.

The current modest level of official development assistance reflects the potential of our growing economy, and we are convinced that the effective and efficient use, and sustained growth, of such official development assistance will place Slovakia more firmly within the group of new emerging donors.

We endorse the appeals made for the strengthening of the role of the United Nations and for improving the efficiency and working methods of its major organs. First and foremost, a comprehensive reform of the Security Council and a revitalization of the General Assembly is needed.

In the past year, the international community has had to deal with events whose significance have put to the test the principles that have governed international relations since the signing of the United Nations Charter. Though it is undisputed that the validity of these principles remains undiminished, we cannot shy away from seeking answers and solutions to the fundamental global challenges that we face today, including extreme poverty, drug smuggling, the spread of deadly diseases and global climate change. Finding appropriate solutions to these and other issues requires multilateral cooperation, with a viable United Nations at its core. We all wish to see a strong and decisive United Nations that is capable of effectively responding to current and future challenges. Slovakia remains committed to multilateralism and to its fundamental institutions.

**The President**: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Claude Morel, Chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Seychelles.

**Mr. Morel** (Seychelles): My delegation is proud and honoured to see Mr. Julian Hunte, a fellow islander, also from one of the smallest nations of the world, presiding over the deliberations of this body. We are well aware of his skills, experience and competence, and we are confident that he will lead our work to a successful outcome. Let me also pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his excellent work during the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

Our appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his dedicated and steadfast leadership of the United Nations during these trying times. We commend him for his tireless efforts to make the United Nations more effective and responsive to the demands of its Members.

In recent months, some have questioned the relevance and utility of the United Nations. For

Seychelles, the United Nations remains a unique, indispensable and universal multilateral institution where global issues affecting the entire international community can be debated and addressed. We believe that, despite its shortcomings, there is no other institution that is better equipped and better suited to meet the diverse demands for justice, peace, security, development and international cooperation or to ensure that the voices of its Members are heard, irrespective of their size or economic power. We hereby reaffirm our faith in the principles and purposes of the United Nations in addressing the wide range of challenges confronting the international community in the globalized and interdependent world we are living in at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

We acknowledge the fact, however, that the United Nations system needs to be reformed and modernized. We support the ongoing initiative to revitalize the General Assembly to make it more effective and efficient. Our Assembly ought to be restored to its rightful place at the centre stage of meaningful deliberations on problems and issues common to all of its Members. We ought to strive to ensure that debate in our Assembly is translated into action. In this respect, my delegation calls for the establishment of a follow-up mechanism to monitor and implement decisions and resolutions taken by the General Assembly, as well as those of the major United Nations conferences of the past decade.

The reform process will be inadequate if the transformation of the Security Council into a democratic and representative organ, reflecting its universal character and present-day realities, is not achieved. My delegation supports an increase in both permanent and non-permanent members to include developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America. After 10 years of debate, it is imperative that we bridge positions and make progress. What is required is political will by all the parties concerned with a view to arriving at an acceptable solution.

We support the decision of the Secretary-General to establish a high-level panel of eminent persons on the reform question. We hope they will provide inspiration and fresh ideas for the way forward.

My delegation holds the view that development ought to be central to the renewed United Nations agenda. The reform process should focus on reinforcing the role of the United Nations system in the commitment to international cooperation for development. There should be closer collaboration and coordination between the United Nations system and the international financial institutions in elaborating novel frameworks to address development funding. The ongoing dialogue between the Economic and Social Council and the Bretton Woods institutions should be vigorously pursued.

We welcome the dialogue between the leaders of the Group of Eight and their counterparts from the developing world. Those consultations should be a platform to engage the industrialized countries of the North in fulfilling their commitments to the outcomes of the major conferences, in particular the Millennium Summit, the Doha Development Round, the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Action. Our development partners should realize that the implementation of their commitments is vital if we, the developing countries, are to achieve sustainable development. Their words must, indeed, be matched with deeds. The allocation of the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product for international development should be an achievable objective.

This dialogue should also provide an opportunity for us to candidly discuss issues that are of common interest and concern. Problems requiring urgent attention, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, the root causes of terrorism, the debt burden, refugees, trade terms, trafficking in humans, climate change and environmental degradation, to name just a few, should be addressed as part and parcel of shared international responsibilities.

The situation of small island developing States will feature high on the international agenda next August when Mauritius hosts the International Meeting for the 10-year review of the Barbados Programme of Action. It will be a timely occasion to reaffirm the special characteristics, vulnerabilities and concerns of small island developing States and to consider their prospects for sustainable development. It will be an occasion to remind the international community to pay greater attention to the social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities faced by small island developing States.

The Mauritius review will present the opportunity to assess implementation progress to date and establish the appropriate framework for further partnership and

cooperation in achieving the sustainable development aspirations of small island developing States. We will need the required resources to advance implementation. We therefore appeal to our development partners for their fullest support in the review process and the implementation of the outcome of the Mauritius International Meeting.

My delegation notes with concern the breakdown of negotiations at the recent World Trade Organization ministerial conference in Cancún. Small developing countries have no capacity whatsoever to distort world trade. It is therefore imperative that their vulnerabilities and special needs be taken fully in account. Seychelles urges the international community to heed the call for special and differential treatment to be accorded to developing countries, in particular small island States, that have structural disadvantages. This is crucial to the integration of our countries into the multilateral trading system so that we can achieve our development objectives. Concessions to small, vulnerable developing economies should include the critical areas of market access and trade preferences.

The second pillar of my country's economy — tuna fisheries — faces a real threat. There will be considerable social and economic consequences for us if the preferential treatment on which the industry was built is to be abandoned. After all, the trade regime is meant to provide benefits for all, not to condemn the most fragile and vulnerable groups of the international family to marginalization and economic strangulation.

A subject of preoccupation to my delegation is the adverse impact of climate change. Studies, as well as experience, have revealed that extreme changes are taking place in the climate patterns of the Western Indian Ocean region. Over recent years my country has experienced unusual periods of drought and torrential rainfall, the latter causing floods, landslides, the destruction of agricultural crops and infrastructure and even loss of life. It is estimated the 75 per cent of the corals in our archipelago have been bleached due to an increase in sea surface temperatures.

Global warming is not an issue of our making. Small island nations like mine are not responsible for it, yet we have to bear the consequences. This growing threat calls for renewed concerted international action, as it is affecting the whole planet. All nations must take steps to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. The industrialized countries have the prime responsibility and must be the first to take action. We urge them to be accountable under the Kyoto commitments and to ratify the treaty, as this is the only appropriate multilateral framework that can address and respond to this phenomenal challenge facing all nations on earth.

Last year the General Assembly endorsed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as the framework for development for the continent. International support for the implementation of this home-grown initiative is essential. We appreciate the pledges of support by the G-8 by means of their Africa Action Plan. We hope that this will soon evolve into the realization of concrete projects and programmes.

My delegation is of the view that there should be provision in the NEPAD development agenda to take into account the peculiar problems and specificities of the eight island nations that constitute the African family.

The 19 August attack on the United Nations compound in Baghdad serves as the latest reminder to all of us of the central importance of being vigilant and prepared to combat terrorism. Seychelles reiterates its condemnation of terrorism in all its manifestations.

We are in the process of finalizing our accession to the 12 United Nations conventions and protocols on terrorism. We are actively cooperating with the Counter-Terrorism Committee in the implementation of the obligations of Security Council resolution 1373 (2001).

Complying with the obligations of this Security Council resolution is a daunting task for a very small country like mine, with extremely limited capacity to deal with the relevant requirements. We will do our share as part of our responsibility, but to succeed we need technical and financial assistance. There is also the need to ensure that the capacities of small States are enhanced through sharing of intelligence information, training of personnel, and the provision of appropriate technology and equipment, for example, to deal with and handle the new challenges we have to confront. We hope the international community will be attentive and responsive to our predicament.

The conflict in the Middle East has brought about too much suffering and destruction. My delegation supports the road map for peace and calls on all parties to the conflict to embark on genuine and substantive dialogue and negotiations in the interest of durable

peace in the region. We reaffirm our belief in the rights of the Palestinian people to their own independent State, with clearly defined borders. We welcome all efforts in facilitating the search for an enduring solution to the conflict.

As regards the situation in Iraq, my delegation hopes that full sovereignty will be restored to the Iraqis as soon as possible, and that a credible and widely accepted political road map will be drawn up and implemented. We believe that the United Nations should have a central role to play in the process.

When Assembly President Julian Hunte assumed office, he appealed for an action-orientated and proactive General Assembly. I give him the assurance that, albeit in a modest manner, he will receive the full-hearted support of the Seychelles delegation for a productive and fruitful session.

**Programme of work**

**The Acting President**: On Monday, 6 October in the morning, the General Assembly will take up, as the first item, agenda item 16 (d), Election of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*